



Op-Ed: Where Do We Go From Here?¹

May 3, 2012 | COL Louis H. Jordan, Jr

Tagged in: Op-Ed

On January 5, 2012, the President announced new strategic guidance for the Department of Defense titled “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century” to support proposed cuts in defense spending that are the result of the drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Simultaneously, lawmakers discussed the need to cut forces and change the retirement system for our military in an effort to gain efficiencies in a sort of 21st century “peace dividend.” A key point of this leaner strategy is a move away from a focus on an era of persistent conflict, to one which emphasizes emerging challenges in the Pacific beyond the Korean peninsula.

An element of the new strategy that will have a profound effect on all of us is the abandonment of the “two war paradigm,” which formed the basis of our current force structure and is now the foundation of the “renewed” concept of Air-Sea Battle (ASB). The former was treated as a code of belief by which all budgets were developed, and the latter, a recurring theory since the days of Billy Mitchell, that suggests that machines can do all things all the time. The reality of the matter is that the “Two Major Regional Conflicts” strategy is not absolute dogma, and ASB does not obviate the need for landpower. Even though the ASB concept is not fiscally driven, it is “fiscally informed” and does fit nicely in our challenging economic situation.

So where does that leave the Army? Actually, not in such a bad place, due to the opportunity that the new strategy provides. Opportunity comes in many shapes and sizes as well as from many directions. This one is coming from the end of a long war and some fiscal realities with which we, as a nation, must soon deal.

We have been at this crossroads before. In fact, this institution, the U.S. Army War College, was established by seizing such an opportunity after the Spanish-American War to solve military failings discovered during that conflict. Opportunity was taken hold of once again at the end of World War II with the creation of the Defense Establishment in 1947 and the Department of Defense in 1949, a concept rejected by the Morrow Board a mere 22 years earlier. Ironically, the end of the Vietnam War provided another opportunity, which resulted in the development of Airland Battle Doctrine to counter the possibility of the Cold War going “hot” on the North German Plain. In each case, we were facing a changing threat and a challenging world.

We have the opportunity to reshape our Army into a force that can continue to fulfill the three roles that the American public expects from its profession of arms and to do so within the construct of the new strategy and fiscal reality. Our Army, as the Chief of Staff of the Army so clearly stated in the February 2012 edition of the Association of the United States Army News, must be able to prevent conflict, enable allies and contain enemies, and ultimately win decisively and dominantly. At the same time, our working environment is changing to one which requires land forces to accomplish many nonconventional missions. There are a number of things we can do across the force, and it really means going back to our uniquely American philosophy found in our Constitution of maintaining a navy and raising an army. The American philosophical psyche has always been shy of a large standing army. It is one of the reasons we fought our revolution. So the natural tendency is to reduce the size of the Army after the end of hostilities. Navies however, maintain free access to trade routes. The Air Force falls into a similar category as the Navy by protecting interests of commerce in and from the air. The biggest difficulty that ground forces will face in the new challenging threat environment will be “anti-access” and “area denial” or A2/AD. New threats in the cyber world will require us to look at “terrain” differently. ASB addresses A2/AD. We can re-tool the Army to take advantage of ASB in several ways.

First, restructuring our Army into a leaner, lighter, active component and a heavier and more consolidated reserve component might be a good initial step which comports with ASB, while delivering some fiscal efficiency, and fulfilling our three national security roles. Arguments against merging the two reserve components are somewhat territorial and distort realities. The “access” question comes from a notion that the Army National Guard (ARNG) is not a federal force when, in fact, it is; but managed by the state until mobilized. The Army Reserve (USAR) is managed by the Army, but still has to be mobilized. The concern that ARNG forces may be held hostage by their

governor doesn't hold weight with the implementation of the Army Force Generation Model (ARFORGEN). Besides, the National Defense Acts of 1987 and 2007 codified the access that the Active Component has to the ARNG. The emotional argument deflated; bogeymen exposed.

We have already, in a way, started down the path of emphasizing the importance of the militia by placing the Chief, National Guard Bureau on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This gesture alone recognized the third armed force specifically mentioned in our Constitution, and precedent had already been set by giving the Commandant of the Marine Corps a seat.

Heavier forces in the Reserve Component (RC) will give the Active Component (AC) the nimbleness necessary to be the landpower "punch" needed to join with air and naval forces to thwart A2/AD strategies. It will be more cost effective since the forces needed for a protracted conventional war will not require as large a support mechanism as they do in the AC, and they will provide the resources required for the homeland missions, which are ultimately desired much more so by the governors. Additionally, this consolidated Reserve Component will leverage the civilian skills to police, rebuild, reshape, and transition to civilian governance after the "punch."

Another way to meet the realities before us would be to establish a continuum of service concept in which members may switch between components, as well as between uniform and nonuniform service, this may be a wise use of a valuable resource: people. That type of flexibility and force mix will give the Army the ability to reach a wider range of talent, while at the same time reducing the size of the standing Army.

We will not "hollow" out the force the way we did at the end of the Vietnam War (or post-Gulf War-1990s). But we still need to reorganize and tighten our belts to meet the new threats and support the new strategy. We must get ahead of the change that is occurring in our world and develop an adaptable force. That is our opportunity.

There is a place for the Army in ASB. Air and sea forces cannot do it alone. Winning decisively means taking ground and holding it, whether it is cyber terrain or terra firma. As we meet the challenge, we must remember that employment of an air force or navy demonstrates to the world what a nation is willing to fight for. The employment of the land forces demonstrates what Americans are willing to die for.

Endnote

1. Percy Wenrich and Howard Johnson, “Where Do We Go From Here,” 1917. It was a popular song written shortly after U.S. entry into World War I in 1917.

The views expressed in this op-ed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. This opinion piece is cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

Organizations interested in reprinting this or other SSI opinion pieces should contact the Publications Department via e-mail at *SSI_Publishing@conus.army.mil*. All organizations granted this right must include the following statement: “Reprinted with permission of the Strategic Studies Institute Newsletter, U.S. Army War College.”